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# THE STRUCTURE OF POLITICAL CONFLICT IN THE NEW STATES OF TROPICAL AFRICA

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## I. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Having assumed the burden of understanding political life in two-and-a-half dozen unruly countries, political scientists who study the new states of tropical Africa must leap with assurance where angels fear to tread. We have borrowed, adapted, or invented an array of frameworks designed to guide perceptions of disparate events, and Africa is now uniformly viewed through the best lenses of contemporary comparative politics with a focus on political modernization, development and integration. Unfortunately, it appears that when we rely exclusively on these tools in order to accomplish our task, the aspects of political life which we, as well as non-specialists, see most clearly with the naked eye of informed common sense, remain beyond the range of our scientific vision. In our pursuit of scientific progress, we have learned to discern such forms as regular patterns of behavior which constitute structures and institutions; but the most salient characteristic of political life in Africa is that it constitutes an almost institutionless arena with conflict and disorder as its most prominent features.

In recent years, almost every new African state has experienced more or less successful military or civilian coups, insurrections, mutinies, severe riots, and significant political assassinations. Some of them appear to be permanently on the brink of disintegration into several new political units. With little regard for the comfort of social scientists, the incidence of conflict and disorder appears unrelated to such variables as type of colonial experience, size, number of parties, absolute level or rate of economic and social development, as well as to the overall characteristics of regimes. The downfall of what was widely regarded as the continent's most promising democracy in January, 1966, was followed in February by the demise of what many thought to be the continent's harshest authoritarian regime.

<sup>1</sup> Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the September 1966, meeting of the American Political Science Association (New York City) and at the Seventh World Congress of the International Political Science Association (Brussels, September, 1967). The category "new states of Tropical Africa" excludes Liberia and Ethiopia.

Furthermore, recent events in Nigeria, Ghana, and elsewhere indicate that military regimes are as fragile as their civilian predecessors. Given the presence of almost every "gap" ever imagined by scholars concerned with development and modernization, and in the absence of the requisites most commonly posited for the maintenance of a political system, there is little place for countries such as these in the conceptual universe of political science. Yet, more often than not, these countries do persist. Hence, we have little choice but either to play an academic ostrich game or come to grips with their reality.

In order to deal in an orderly manner with such disorderly countries, we must alter our vision. Our normal focus on institutions and their concomitant processes resembles the focus of the untrained eye on the enclosed surface, or figure, of an image. The naive observer sees interstices as "shapeless parts of the underlying ground. He pays no attention to them, and finds it difficult and unnatural to do so."<sup>2</sup> Like trained painters, however, we must force ourselves to reverse the spontaneous figure-ground effect in order to perceive "interstices," shapes which initially do not appear worthy of our attention, but are in fact fundamental to our perception of the surface under observation. To understand political life in Africa, instead of viewing political disturbances as the shapeless ground surrounding institutions and processes which define the regimes of the new states, we must try to view them as characteristic processes which themselves constitute an important aspect of the regime in certain types of political systems.<sup>3</sup>

## II. AFRICAN POLITICAL SYSTEMS AND THEIR ENVIRONMENT

On the whole, African countries are distinguished from other Third World clusters

<sup>2</sup> Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965), p. 230.

<sup>3</sup> Notions concerning the political system apparent in this paper are inspired by the works of David Easton, but clearly lack the intellectual rigor of *A Systems Analysis of Political Life* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1965).

by extremely weak national centers, a periphery which consists of societies until recently self-contained, and levels of economic and social development approaching the lowest limits of international statistical distributions.<sup>4</sup> They continue to reflect the fact that their origins stem from a recent European scramble for portions of an international system or sub-system constituted by interacting tribal societies. Although the French, British, Belgian, Portuguese or German nets were sometimes cast over an area dominated by a single society or by a group of societies with similar characteristics, this was usually not the case at all. Within the administrative nets which later became states there were only a few decades ago a varying number of more or less disparate societies, each with a distinct political system, and with widely different intersocietal relationships.

Although the new political units provided a territorial mold within which social, economic, political, and cultural changes that accompanied colonization occurred, we are becoming increasingly aware that these processes, although related, did not necessarily vary "rhythmically," i.e., at the same rate;<sup>5</sup> and that the rates of change varied not only between countries but also between regions of the same country. If we conceive the original African societies as sets of values, norms, and structures, it is evident that they survived to a significant extent everywhere, even where their existence was not legally recognized as in the most extreme cases of direct rule. Furthermore, the new set of values, norms, and structure, which constituted an incipient national center did not necessarily grow at the expense of the older ones, as if it were a constant-sum game in which the more a country becomes "modern" the less it remains "traditional." Although many individuals left the country for the new towns, they did not necessarily leave one society to enter a new one; instead, the behavior of a given individual tended to be governed by norms from both sets which defined his multiple roles and even mixed to define a particular role. Because the new center had nowhere expanded sufficiently at the time of independence, we cannot characterize what

is contained within these countries today as a single society in the normally accepted sociological sense of the word, with its connotation of a relatively integrated system of values, norms, and structures. But since the new African states in reality do provide territorial containers for two sets of values, norms, and structures, the "new" and the "residual," with the latter itself usually subdivided into distinct sub-sets, it is useful to think of these sets as forming a particular type of *unintegrated* society which can be called "syncretic."<sup>6</sup>

The syncretic character of contemporary African societies tends to be reflected in every sphere of social activity, including the political. If we seek to identify their political systems by asking how values are authoritatively allocated within these societies, it is evident that in every case the most visible structures and institutions with which political scientists normally deal, such as executive and legislative bodies, political parties and groups, the apparatus of territorial administration, the judiciary, and even the institutions of local government provided by law, deal with only a portion of the total allocative activity, and that the remainder must therefore be allocated by other means, by other structures. This is fairly obvious where some functional division of labor between "modern" and "traditional" institutions was provided for initially as part of the constitutional settlement at the time of independence, but it is equally the case where traditional political structures have no recognized legal or political standing, or even where they have been formally abolished, as in Guinea or Mali.<sup>7</sup>

Without denying important variations in the

<sup>6</sup> The problem with which I am dealing here is akin to that of the "plural society" conceptualized by M. G. Smith in *The Pleural Society in the British West Indies* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965). The word "syncretic" distinguishes the present societies from the "plural," which is a particular type involving super-ordination between components. I prefer it to the more passive "heterogeneous," because "syncretic" connotes that a process of amalgamation and integration is being attempted.

<sup>7</sup> For a further development of this point, see my book *Creating Political Order: The Party-States of West Africa* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1966), Chapter V. My reasoning here is deductive; but empirical evidence from micro-political studies of Ghana by David Brokensha and Ernst Benjamin, of Mali by Nicholas Hopkins and of Tanzania by Henry Bienen, confirm the validity of the assumption.

<sup>4</sup> For the concepts used see Edward Shils, "Centre and Periphery," in *The Logic of Personal Knowledge—Essays in Honor of Michael Polanyi* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), pp. 117–130. See also note 42, below.

<sup>5</sup> See the discussion in C. S. Whitaker, Jr., "A Dysrhythmic Process of Political Change," *World Politics*, 19 (January, 1967), 190–217.

degree of institutionalization of national centers in different countries, it is suggested that from the present vantage point, even the most prominent variations in political arrangements at the time of independence must be viewed as superficial features of the political system since they were never firmly institutionalized. An examination of political parties, the best studied feature of the African scene, reveals such a wide gap between the organizational model from which the leaders derived their inspiration and their capacity to implement such schemes, that the very use by observers of the word "party" to characterize such structures involves a dangerous reification.

These comments may be extended to include constitutional arrangements, which in the absence of anchorage in supporting norms and institutions had little reality beyond their physical existence as a set of written symbols deposited in a government archive; about the civil service, in which the usual bureaucratic norms are so rare that it is perhaps better to speak of "government employees" as a categorical group; of "trade unions," which are more by way of congeries of urban employed and unemployed intermittently mobilized for a temporary purpose, such as a street demonstration; and even of "the Army," which far from being a model of hierarchical organization, tends to be an assemblage of armed men who may or may not obey their officers. It is generally evident that the operations of even the most "modern" institutions in Africa are governed by values and norms that stem from both the "new" and the "residual" sets.

The societal environment shared by all the new African states thus imposes severe limits upon the range within which significant variations of regimes can take place. Whether we define political integration in terms of the existence of a political formula which bridges the gap between the elite and the masses, or in terms of linkages between the values, norms, and structures that constitute the political system, it is clear that the level of political integration was, at the time of the founding, very low throughout Africa. Hence, although we can refer to the existence of "states" and "regimes" in Africa, we must be careful not to infer from these labels that their governments necessarily have authority over the entire country, any more than we can safely infer from the persistence of these countries as sovereign entities proof of the operations of endogenous factors such as a sense of community and the ability of authorities to enforce cohesion against people's will. Persistence

may only reflect the initial inertia which keeps instruments of government inherited from the colonial period going, as well as the inertia of claimants which assures in most cases that all the problems will not reach the center simultaneously; it may reflect also the absence of effective external challenges and even to a certain extent the protection provided by the contemporary international system which more often than not guarantees the existence of even the weakest of sovereign states born out of the decolonization of tropical Africa.

Under these generally shared circumstances, it is not surprising that the founding fathers of most African states behaved very much in the same way in order to achieve the dual goal of modernizing as rapidly as possible while maintaining themselves in office. Like any other government, they had to cope with the problem of managing the flow of demands while at the same time eliciting sufficient support. They could obtain support in exchange for the satisfaction of demands (distribution); they could enhance support on the basis of the internalization by a sufficiently large proportion of the population of a belief in their right to rule (socialization, legitimacy); they could suppress demands by negative reinforcement, while at the same time punishing non-support (coercion and force). In the face of overwhelming problems stemming from the syncretic character of the society they relied increasingly on the latter techniques, thus contributing substantially to the escalation of political conflict.

Initially, the founding fathers of African states benefited from the sudden creation of a multitude of new political offices, from the departure of a number of colonial officials, from the expansion of administrative and state-directed economic activity which had begun during the latter years of welfare-state colonialism, as well as from a prevalent sense that they had earned the right to rule through their leadership of protest movements and that they were the legitimate successors of colonial officials. On these foundations, many were able to construct adequate political machines based primarily on the distribution of benefits to individual and group claimants, in the form of shifting coalitions appearing either as a "multi-party system," or more commonly, as a "unified" party. In the light of the politicians' inability to maintain themselves in office for very long (except in a very few cases) and of the lurid revelations of their corruption and ineptitude which made headlines after their downfall, it is easy to forget that many of them were initially quite successful in developing



symbols and organizations which could be used to channel support and to establish the legitimacy of their claim to rule in the eyes of their countrymen. Beyond this, they also benefited from the sort of inertia already referred to, whereby those individuals who were aware of the existence of country-wide political institutions simply accepted them as a continuation of what they were already used to, the colonial order, but with a welcome populist flavor. The inheritance of instruments of force (police, gendarmerie, small armies), usually among the more professionalized bodies and often under the continued supervision of European officers, provided a certain backing in case the political process failed.

### III. THE SHIFT FROM POWER TO FORCE

The shift to a new phase of political activity is related to two sets of mutually reinforcing factors, stemming from the interaction of the rulers with the syncretic society in which they operated. First, there was a growing gap between the leaders' ideological aspirations and their capacity to implement the policies these aspirations entailed. Whether or not it is appropriate to speak of a "revolution of rising expectations" throughout the continent, there is little doubt that such a revolution has occurred among those responsible for government, in the form of a commitment to rapid modernization. The most obvious examples here are the "mobilizing" states, such as Ghana (until 1966), Mali, or Guinea, in which this commitment was defined in a very specific manner to include the transformation of the syncretic society into a homogeneous society by eliminating the "residual" set of values, norms, and structures and institutionalizing the new set according to ideological directives; the creation of an all-pervasive state apparatus, including both an all-encompassing mass party which could function as a controlling organization in the Leninist sense and as an aggregative organization, and an effective Africanized bureaucracy; and a planned economy geared to the achievement of very high increase in the rate of total output, as well as economic self-sufficiency in which the State plays the dominant role. Whether or not they espoused "socialism" in this form, most other African leaders shared these aspirations, albeit in some modified form. Since African countries are farther behind with respect to most of these goals than any other set of countries in the world, however, the result is that governments with the lowest load capability have assumed the heaviest burdens. But in the process of trying to raise the capability of their govern-

ments to achieve these goals, African rulers frittered away their small initial political capital of legitimacy, distributive capacity, inertia and coercion by investing it in non-essential undertakings, much as many of them did in the economic sector. A major source of the vulnerability of African regimes thus stems from adherence to self-imposed ideological directives.

Secondly, even if properly allocated this capital was seldom adequate to deal with political difficulties stemming from the very character of the syncretic society, the circumstances of decolonization, and the characteristics of the new institutions themselves. This was most obvious in the case of the Congo, where challenges stemming from every direction occurred simultaneously and most dramatically within a few weeks after independence. Although elsewhere the challenges have been less extreme and have usually been spaced over a few years, while the countervailing power and force at the disposal of the government was somewhat greater, their cumulative impact has not necessarily been much less severe. Everywhere, African governments have been faced with some or all of the consequences of the politicization of residual cleavages which occurred in the course of the rapid extension of political participation prior to independence; and of an inflationary spiral of demands stemming from the very groups whose support is most crucial for the operations of government. Since these processes are often discussed in the literature, only their major features will be noted here.

1. *The Politicization of Primordial Ties*.<sup>8</sup> Pre-existing distinctions between groups in Africa were usually supplemented by others stemming from the uneven impact of European-generated change. Often, by the time of independence, one tribe or group of tribes had become more urban, more educated, more Christian and richer than others in the country. Hence, at the mass level, old and new cleavages tend to be consistent rather than cross-cutting; camps are clear-cut and individuals can engage wholeheartedly in the disputes that occur;

<sup>8</sup> For a general treatment of this topic, see Clifford Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution," in Clifford Geertz (ed.), *Old Societies and New States* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963) pp. 105-157. Although every serious monograph on African politics has also dealt with the subject, it is unfortunate that no effort has been made to refine for Africa the comparative analysis of the phenomenon along the lines suggested by Geertz.

almost any issue can precipitate a severe conflict; the history of conflict itself tends to make the next occurrence more severe; with few intervening layers of community organization, even localized conflicts rapidly reach the center. They tend to be particularly severe where there is an asymmetry between the old and the new stratification system within a single society or between complementary societies, as when for some reason serfs become more educated than their masters or when their greater number becomes a source of political power at the time universal suffrage is introduced.

At the level of the modernizing leadership, recruitment is usually uneven, but nevertheless open to a certain extent to the various groups in the country; common life-experiences insure a certain degree of solidarity which provides offsetting cross-cutting affiliations; and ethnic ties make an important contribution to national integration by preventing the formation of the sharp elite-mass gap that is common in peasant societies. But there is always a very great strain on the solidarity of the modernizing leadership because, regardless of their ideological orientation, political entrepreneurs who seek to establish or maintain a following must necessarily rely on primordial ties to distinguish between "us" and "them." When it appeared that the shape of the polity was being settled rapidly, perhaps once and for all, a multitude of groups began to press their legitimate claims for the protection of their way of life, for a redefinition of the relationship between their own peripheral society and the center, and for a more satisfactory distribution of benefits. Many latent disputes were revived and flowed into the new arena provided by central institutions. Hence it is not surprising that even in countries where one party seemed to be solidly established the leadership felt that their country was less integrated than ever before. Where several ethnic-regional movements vied for power, and especially where participation was extended very suddenly, the consequences of these cleavages and ensuing conflicts upon the center were even more disturbing.<sup>9</sup>

In general, almost any difference between two groups can become politically significant, even if from the point of view of the ethnographer the two groups belong to the same cultural classification. Although each of the oppositions tends to involve but a small pro-

portion of the total population, because of the very nature of the groups involved, many permutations are possible and contagion can set in. Suitable institutional arrangements, such as various forms of territorial federalism, proportional or communal representation, and institutional quotas, are not easily designed in situations where primordial identities are as numerous and fluid as they are in most of the countries under consideration.

2. *The Inflation of Demands:* The second major source of challenge involves three crucial categories of individuals: civilian employees of government, men in uniform, and youths. Government employees, who include not only professional civil servants but also a large number of low-level, unskilled clerical personnel and manual workers employed in the operation of the governmental infrastructure (railways, harbors, road maintenance, and public works generally) usually constitute a very large proportion of those gainfully employed outside of agriculture. Promotions were initially rapid because of Africanization and the vast expansion of government agencies; many programs of economic development have had as their major consequence a reallocation of national revenue to the benefit of the managers, including both government employees and politicians; and government employees often constitute in terms of income and prestige the most privileged group in the society, after the politicians themselves. Yet, these same factors have contributed to a process of acute relative deprivation. Because of their very occupation and training, government employees have internalized to a greater extent than most others the style of life of their European predecessors; they feel that on the grounds of native ability and training they are qualified to rule rather than merely to execute policies; rapid promotions only lead to higher aspirations among those who have already been promoted and among those left behind, while the rate of governmental expansion tapers off soon after independence. During the colonial period, government employees who vented their grievances against their employer were "good nationalists"; as they continue to do so after independence, they are a "selfish privileged class." The deterioration in the relationship between government employees and the politicians is relatively independent of the ideological orientation of the regime itself: in most of French-speaking Africa, government employees are "leftists" in relation to whatever the government's orientation happens to be at a given time; but in Ghana, under Nkrumah, civil servants constituted a sort of

<sup>9</sup> I have attempted to deal with this question in *One-Party Government in the Ivory Coast* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), pp. 47, 77, 128-134.

"rightist" opposition to the regime. Since personnel expenditures constitute as much as two-thirds or more of the government's annual expenditures, any demands that require translation into resource allocation tend to create a major financial crisis.

The grievance orientation toward government extends also to those employed in the private sector, since even in countries that are not nominally "socialist," *étatisme* prevails; the private industrial or commercial sector is closely regulated since major firms usually operate on the basis of government guarantees concerning manpower costs. So much of the workers' real income takes the form of benefits rather than money wages (family allocations, housing, etc.) that any sort of collective bargaining usually involves a modification of rules governing labor and leads to a showdown between the government and the unions. Finally, a similar process prevails among cash-crop farmers, for example, since marketing operations are managed or at least closely regulated by government. Demands in this sector are therefore necessarily and automatically "political," and governments are even viewed as responsible for controlling the fluctuations of world markets for tropical commodities, over which most of them have but a very limited leverage.

Men in uniform tend to act very much like other government employees. In the absence of institutionalized values and norms which transform men in uniform into a military establishment and a police force, officers and men are ruled by the norms that prevail among other groups; hence what has been said above applies to them as well. Furthermore, they rapidly find out that by virtue of their organizational characteristics and their control of certain instruments of force, they are indeed the best organized trade union in the country. As I shall point out below, this is not the only factor which has led the military to intervene in African politics; but it has helped set the mood for certain types of interventions and for the general relationship between the military and civilian politicians.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The most useful recent surveys of African military establishments are presented in the publications of the Institute of Strategic Studies, London. See in particular, M. J. V. Bell, "Army and Nation in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Adelphi Papers*, No. 21 (August, 1965); and David Wood, "The Armed Forces of African States," *Adelphi Papers*, No. 27 (April, 1966). For an earlier essay, see James S. Coleman and Belmont Bryce, Jr., "The Role of the Military in Sub-

As Lucian Pye has noted, "The non-Western political process is characterized by sharp differences in the political orientation of the generations," primarily because of a "lack of continuity in the circumstances under which people are recruited to politics."<sup>11</sup> In most African countries, it was easy for a particular age-cohort to move from relatively modest positions in the occupational structure to the highest positions in both the polity and the economy. Within a single decade, clerks and elementary school teachers became Presidents, cabinet ministers, members of party executives, directors of large trading establishments, etc. But for the next generations, whose expectations are based on the experience of their predecessors, conditions have fundamentally changed. First of all, the uppermost positions have already been filled by relatively young men who see no precise time limit to their tenure. Secondly, men with some education and occupational qualifications have rapidly become much less scarce because of the huge growth of secondary and higher education during the post-World War II decade. Thus, there has been a manifold increase in supply while the demand has abruptly decreased. The result is that newer generations face an insurmountable glut which frustrates their aspirations, with very few opportunities for movement into alternative spheres of activity.<sup>12</sup> Hence, the intergenerational gap within the political sphere can be noticed in almost every other institutional sphere, including especially the civil service and the military. It is exacerbated by the fact that the newer generations are usually in fact better trained and more highly qualified than their predecessors and hence have a very legitimate claim to take their place. To these discrepancies in recruitment must be added gaps in political socialization. In syncretic societies, the regime has very little control over the major mechanisms of socialization, the family and the primary group, and only partially over the educational structure. There is little likelihood that new generations

Saharan Africa," in John J. Johnson (ed.), *The Role of the Military in Underdeveloped Countries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), pp. 359-405.

<sup>11</sup> Lucian Pye, "The Non-Western Political Process," in H. Eckstein and D. Apter (eds.), *Comparative Politics* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), p. 660.

<sup>12</sup> On patterns of recruitment of new elites and their consequences see Rémi Clignet and Philip Foster, *The Fortunate Few* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966).



will have a set of attitudes compatible with the requirements of the new order. This is particularly important given two factors: The rapid growth of a large body of slightly educated, unemployed young urbanites; and the general shape of the demographic pyramid in which adolescents and young adults constitute a very large proportion of the total population. Intergenerational conflict is exacerbated by the fact that youthful discontent tends to be manifested not only by individual deviance from established norms, but also in the appearance of age-homogeneous movements and organizations, functional equivalents of the familiar youth gangs of industrialized societies, which tend to maintain a distinctive sub-culture and to act autonomously in the political sphere.<sup>13</sup> "Youth" is thus transformed from a mere categoric group into a movement.

In concluding this brief review of the consequences of the politicization of residual cleavages and of the inflationary spiral of demands voiced by crucial groups in the society it is important to note that the two processes are seldom insulated from each other. Government employees, soldiers, or young men in the towns are *also* members of ethnic groups; yet, these several affiliations do not constitute the sort of web of group affiliation characteristic of "pluralist" societies. Hence, the two processes reinforce each other to produce recurrent, serious, and complex conflicts, which easily penetrate into the political arena because of the weakness of aggregative structures. But even if they do not immediately result in an increase in demands or in a withdrawal of support, they constitute serious disturbances from the point of view of governments engaged in building a nation since by their very existence they provide evidence that this goal has not been achieved.

The added weight contributed by these processes to the burdens of government is relatively independent of the wisdom or devotion of particular political leaders, factors which will not be considered here. The difficulties of government in syncretic societies are so great, however, that the marginal consequences of human error, of weakness, and of sheer roguery—whose incidence among African politicians may be assumed to be about the same as among equivalent men elsewhere—are vastly magnified. For example, corruption among government officials, which probably did not

interfere with the industrial take-off of European countries or the United States (and perhaps even facilitated it), can have very damaging consequences where it diverts a large proportion of very scarce, non-expanding resources, away from the public domain into the pockets of a non-productive bureaucratic bourgeoisie. Impatience and arbitrary actions, which elsewhere may only lead to the discrediting of a public figure and to personal tragedy, can become sparks which ignite a major conflict.

Within a few years the two types of challenges discussed above strained the restricted distributive potential of the new governments and rapidly undermined the limited legitimacy of the founders. The center's weakness, hitherto hidden from sight, was unmercifully exposed, as when the value of the currency issued by a national banking system is drastically reduced when the credit pyramid, itself based on the productivity of the economy, collapses.<sup>14</sup> In the new situation, demands are expressed more vociferously; depositors knock down the gatekeepers and seek to invade the vault. Parsons has suggested that the system's response can be twofold: "First, an increasingly stringent scale of priorities of what can and cannot be done will be set up; second, increasingly severe negative sanctions for non-compliance with collective decisions will be imposed."<sup>15</sup> Political power, normally based on the overall social structure, gives way to force.

Although no African rulers ever abandoned completely their reliance on the techniques of machine politics to maintain themselves in office, illustrations of a trend toward the use of force abound and constitute by now a monotonous recitation of unpleasant but familiar facts of African political life: intimidation, exile, detention, or assassination of political opponents; modification of the electoral system to make competition either impossible or at least very costly to those who attempt to engage in it; reduction of the independence of

<sup>13</sup> Conditions under which the phenomenon occurs are specified by S. N. Eisenstadt, *From Generation to Generation* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1956).

<sup>14</sup> The analogy is drawn from Talcott Parsons, "Some Reflections on the Place of Force in Social Process," in Harry Eckstein (ed.), *Internal War* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), p. 59-64. A similar analysis is provided by Martin Kilson in *Political Change in a West African State: A Study of the Modernization Process in Sierra Leone* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), with emphasis on the initial growth of "reciprocity" and the eventual inadequacy of this political technique.

<sup>15</sup> Parsons. *op. cit.*, p. 64.



the judiciary or creation side-by-side with it of dependable political courts; redefinition of loyalty into unquestioning obedience and sycophancy; use of the military, of the police, and of political thugs to bulldoze dissidents into passivity, and passives into demonstrative supporters; creation of additional quasi-military or quasi-police bodies to offset the questionable loyalty of the existing ones. Although coups which result in changes of government have attracted the most attention, the most frequent coups in Africa have probably been those initiated by an incumbent government against threatening individuals or groups (real or alleged), and those launched by rulers or dominant factions against their associates.

Beyond its immediate unfortunate consequences for the individuals affected, the shift from power to force as a technique of government has serious long-term consequences for political life more generally in that it serves as the prelude to anti-government coups and revolutions, in the following manner:

a. In the process of shifting from power to force, governments tend to become over-confident in their ability to reduce the disturbing flow of demands by dealing harshly with their source. They become afraid that any concession might be interpreted as weakness and open up a Pandora's box of claims. Hence, less change occurs altogether. Governments become less adept at discriminating among danger signals and tend to deal with even the smallest disturbances by expending a great deal of force.<sup>16</sup> But since the capital of force is small it becomes rapidly used up in relatively unnecessary undertakings, thus increasing the government's vulnerability to more serious threats.

b. When a shift from power to force occurs, it is accompanied by a change in the relative market value of existing structures. In the case of the new African states, the relative value of political parties and of civilian administrative agencies has undergone a sort of deflation, while the value of the police, of the military, and of *any* organization capable of exercising force, even by the sheer manipulation of large numbers of people in demonstrations and civil disobedience actions, has been vastly increased.

c. Although the shift to force represents an attempt to overcome deteriorating legitimacy and inadequate power, paradoxically it en-

hances the problem of the legitimacy of the rulers in the eyes of those to whom the implementation of force must necessarily be entrusted. As Parsons has indicated: "Most important, whatever the physical technology involved, a critical factor in socially effective force is always the social organization through which it is implemented. There is always some degree of dependance on the loyalties of the relevant personnel to the elements of the social structure ostensibly controlling them."<sup>17</sup> Attempts to balance one instrument of force which is thought to be unreliable by creating another merely modifies the problem of control of force by political means, but does not eliminate it. In fact, resort to this technique may exacerbate the very problem it seeks to overcome by antagonizing individuals identified with the relevant institution.

d. When individuals and groups are deprived of the right and opportunity of exercising power to express their demands, they have no choice but to submit to force or use it themselves to express their demands. But when the government's capital of force is discovered to be limited, the latter alternative tends to be frequently chosen. Furthermore, since authority is personalized and the government is committed to a rigid course, specific demands tend to be translated into demands for a general change of rulers.

It is within the context of this inter-relationship between governments who rely on force and the remainder of the society that the growing frequency of military and civilian coups, successful or unsuccessful; of mutinies, large-scale and prolonged urban strikes or rural disturbances; of near-civil wars, insurrections, and revolutionary-minded movements, must be understood.

#### IV. THE COUP AS A POLITICAL INSTITUTION<sup>18</sup>

The coup can be viewed as an institutionalized pattern of African politics on statistical grounds since in recent years it has become the modal form of governmental and regime

<sup>17</sup> Parsons, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>16</sup> This proposition is related to Apter's suggestion that there is "an inverse relationship between information and coercion in a system." (David E. Apter, *The Politics of Modernization* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965], p. 40.)

<sup>18</sup> It is difficult to analyze the patterns of coups because it is impossible to identify the components of the universe with which one must deal. If incumbent rulers are to be believed, attempted coups against the government are extremely frequent in almost every African country; but what appear to be anti-government plots may in fact be only government-initiated purges. The present analysis is based exclusively on secondary sources. Unless otherwise specified, data are drawn from reports in *West Africa*

change. More significantly, however, the coup is a normal consequence of the showdown between a government and its opponents who use force against each other in a situation where the force at the disposal of the government is very limited. This condition, which is met in most African countries, is most important because it distinguishes the conflict situation that tends to lead to a coup from others which tend to develop into some form of internal war as the result of extensive mobilization of support by both sides. In Africa, the government usually falls too soon for this to occur; there is some evidence that governments even prefer dissolving themselves to fighting. Coups determine who will rule, at least temporarily, but do not in themselves affect the fundamental character of the society or of its political system. The scope of the conflict is limited in relation to the society as a whole. Coups may be accompanied by some brutality but seldom entail more strategic forms of violence.

As of mid-1967, the set of new states of tropical Africa could be divided into two subsets of almost equal numbers: those which had experienced at least one change of central government personnel as the result of a coup, and those which had not. But almost all the units in the second sub-set had experienced some serious challenge; some had withstood it only through external intervention on behalf of the incumbents; and it appeared probable that the next coup, or the one after that, would be successful. As I suggested in the introduction, the incidence of coups appears to be independent of the quantitative or qualitative variables normally used to differentiate among African states. Attempted or successful coups are always justified by the initiators, and often explained by observers, with reference to the corruption, ineffectiveness, and arbitrariness of the incumbents; but it is impossible to distinguish any significant threshold beyond which these faults and weaknesses become intolerable and it would probably be impossible to demonstrate that the regimes of countries in which successful coups have occurred were, as a group, more vulnerable to these criticisms than others. Whether or not a coup occurs in a given African country at a particular time is related

to specific and circumstantial features of that country's current political and economic situation, rather than to any fundamental and lasting characteristics which differentiate that country from others on the continent. The most significant variable may well be the passing of time, a factor often neglected in studies of regime stability in the developing countries.<sup>19</sup> Except in the most extreme situations, coups are more likely to occur after a few years of independence than initially because it takes some time for a government to use up its initial political capital and for opponents to test the government's strength.

If the *incidence* of coups appears random, this is not true of the manner in which they develop. The atmosphere within which a coup is likely to occur can be created by almost any type of conflict situation, originating almost anywhere in the social structure, within the ruling elite or outside of it. But not every kind of showdown between the government and its opponents is equally likely to lead to the government's downfall. The government has to be physically threatened, which means that the initiators of the coup must be able to deploy force in the capital. Hence, successful coups usually involve two bodies of manpower: trade unions and the formal bearers of force, the Army and the police (including of course such bodies as the gendarmerie, where one exists). But these two bodies are related in an asymmetrical fashion: the unions cannot bring about the downfall of the government without the support of the Army (active or passive), while the Army can carry out a successful coup without securing any alliances. In the final analysis, then, the role of the Army is determinative. As one African journalist has put it, "the Army has established itself as a no man's land between the elite and the masses."<sup>20</sup>

Given the small size and organizational weakness of the military establishments inherited by most countries from the colonial era, few students of African politics devoted much attention to its potential political role until it became manifest. Yet, James Coleman and Belmont Bryce, Jr. indicated in one of the first essays on the subject that the Congo crisis

(London), *Afrique Nouvelle* (Dakar), *Le Monde, Sélection Hebdomadaire* (Paris), *The Times* (London), *The New York Times*, *Jeune Afrique* (Tunis), *Africa Report* (Washington), and *Africa Digest* (London). A more detailed analysis of military interventions will appear in my contribution to Henry Bienen (ed.), *The Military Intervenes* (New York: Russell Sage, 1968).

<sup>19</sup> As for example in the hypothesis discussed by Samuel P. Huntington, "Political Development and Political Decay," *World Politics*, 17 (April, 1965), p. 427. His data are based on Fred R. von der Mehden, *Politics of the Developing Nations* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.; Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), p. 65.

<sup>20</sup> Justin Vieyra in *Jeune Afrique*, December 12, 1965.

of 1960, in which an Army which had recently shown every sign of disaggregation was able to act as the arbiter between the President and the Prime Minister, demonstrated "the determinative influence which a small military force could exercise in a situation in which countervailing institutions of power groups are absent."<sup>21</sup> How small "small" can be is now clear in the light of the successful interventions by the Togolese Army of 250 men in 1963 and by the Central African Republic's Army of 600 men in 1966, each of which was the smallest military establishment on the continent at the time of its coup. Perhaps the only reason for the slight delay in the army's prominence was the fact that in some countries the uppermost levels of the army were not Africanized until several years after independence, while in others the presence of European garrisons or bilateral defense agreements provided some protection against the African government's own military.<sup>22</sup> Even under these conditions, however, the determinative role of the military in political conflict should have been apparent to us much earlier: for example, the breakup of the Federation of Mali in 1960 involved initially a dispute between Senegal and Soudan over the appointment of the chief of the general staff, while the eventual showdown involved a clash between the pro-Senegalese gendarmerie (with the help of French Community officers) and troops under the command of the Soudanese Chief of Staff; the gendarmerie's action turned the tide in favor of Senegal.<sup>23</sup> In Senegal two and a half years later, President Senghor's control over a single battalion of airborne troops insured his victory over Prime Minister Mamadou Dia, who had initially deployed the gendarmerie (with some Army support) against the President's partisans.<sup>24</sup>

Relationships between civilian governments and the military have steadily deteriorated, in keeping with the processes discussed in the preceding section. In addition, the government's very reliance on the military as an instrument of force brought about a transformation of the military outlook as officers be-

came intimately acquainted with the seamy side of political life and were able to form an accurate estimate of the government's authority. Initially, the military tended to intervene against obviously weak governments such as the Congo-Kinshasa, Togo, the Congo-Brazzaville, or Dahomey; but later, even the strongest governments appeared to be much less formidable. Hence, there has been a steady escalation of the character of military interventions. Initially they took the form of strike-mutinies (to secure better pay, the removal of unpopular officers, better pensions for veterans, or an expansion of the army) and referee actions (in the face of prolonged stalemate between contending politicians, or urban disorder resulting from strikes and demonstration). These early interventions usually led to the establishment of a compromise civilian government satisfactory to the military and to a return of the military to its barracks.<sup>25</sup> More recently, however, the military has tended to engage in comprehensive takeovers. Several of these have occurred after earlier referee actions failed to bring about the desired changes; in others, a coup which appeared to be initially intended as a referee action was gradually transformed into a full-scale takeover when attempts to bring about a reconciliation among civilian politicians failed; in the light of these experiences, military leaders have become even less hesitant to establish military rule from the very beginning.

The institutionalization of the coup as an important means of government change in Africa stems not only from the internal characteristics of each country but also from the phenomenon of contagion. When African states first became independent, they were still isolated from one another, except when they formed colonial groupings, such as British East or French West Africa; international physical, social, and political communications were almost non-existent. Hence, during an initial period, disturbances in one country (Sudan, 1958; Congo-Kinshasa, 1960; Ethiopia, 1960) do not seem to have had any significant consequences for others, except when they occurred within one of the colonial groups (as in former French-speaking Africa from mid-1962

<sup>21</sup> Coleman and Bryce, *op. cit.*, p. 399.

<sup>22</sup> The Congo crisis of 1960 reminds us, however, that African troops can launch mutinies against their European officers.

<sup>23</sup> William J. Foltz, *From French West Africa to the Mali Federation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), pp. 176-183.

<sup>24</sup> Victor Du Bois, "The Trial of Mamadou Dia," *American Universities Field Staff Report Service*, West Africa Series, VI, No. 6 (June, 1963), pp. 4-8.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, the analysis of Dahomey and the Congo-Brazzaville in Emmanuel Terray, "Les révolutions congolaise et dahoméenne de 1963: essai d'interprétation," *Revue Française de Science Politique*, 14 (October, 1964), 917-942. A more detailed account of the process of escalation is presented in my paper cited in note 18



to early 1964, and in former British East Africa in January, 1964). More recently, however, the countries of the continent have become much more of an interacting international sub-system as denoted not only by the formation of the Organization of African Unity and other formal groupings that cut across former colonial boundaries, but also by the growth of informal political ties among leaders and of intervention by one country in another country's politics. Within this new context, waves of coups are more likely to occur. Although it is very difficult to show direct connections between events in Algeria (June, 1965), the Congo-Kinshasa (October), and the other countries in which military interventions occurred during the four months that followed, the first two did set the precedent for an escalation from referee actions to takeovers. For West Africa as a region, the links are much more specific. The military leaders of the Central African Republic, of Upper Volta, and of Dahomey have known one another since they served their apprenticeship together in Indochina; and although there is no evidence of concerted action, it is likely that for each of them the promotion of the group as a whole created new political aspirations. Beyond this, General Soglo has explained that his takeover in Dahomey was prompted by the fear that the elections scheduled for early 1966 might crystallize the North-South cleavage and result in disorder similar to that which prevailed among the Yoruba of neighboring Western Nigeria during recent elections, and about which Dahomeyans, many of whom are also Yoruba, were well informed.<sup>26</sup> Conversely, Soglo's success probably affirmed the resolution of Nigerian officers next door; their success in turn may have inspired their Ghanaian counterparts, with whom they share not only British professional traditions but also exposure to the disastrous consequences of political disorder gained while serving in the Congo with ONUC.

Within one country also coups engender other coups. The success of one set of claimants encourages others to try. Even the establishment of military regimes does not lessen the probability of future civilian or military coups, since the very characteristics of African armies insure that the solidarity of their leadership, the control they have over their own organization, and their authority over the society at large, are not likely to be much greater than

what they were in the government they replaced.<sup>27</sup>

#### V. FORCE AS AN INSTRUMENT OF MAJOR POLITICAL CHANGE

Both the ins and the outs in Africa have also attempted to use force in order to achieve more fundamental changes including the modification of political communities, the alteration of important aspects of the stratification system, and the transformation of regimes (in Easton's sense of "regularized method for ordering political relationships"). These attempts may be initiated by the original founders, by new governments resulting from successful coups, or by alternative elites who seek to construct a competing system of authority while the government they oppose is still in place. Since these attempts usually involve the mobilization of extensive support, they tend to lead to an enlargement of the scope of conflict and may entail more strategic forms of violence. Except in a few specific situations discussed below, however, force fails to bring about major political change in Africa. In particular, political revolutions are unlikely to succeed because they entail prerequisites which are absent from the syncretic societies of contemporary Africa.

1. *The Modification of Political Communities:* Force is often invoked in Africa to bring about a redefinition of the territorial extent of the political community or of the internal relationship between some of its major components. Many countries contain regions that wish to secede, either to constitute an autonomous state or to join a neighbor. Such situations usually arise when one or more of the following features are present: an ethnic group which straddles two countries, one segment of which comes to believe that it is in the wrong country; territorially contiguous societies with asymmetrical status cultures, particularly in countries which straddle the borderline between Arabized Muslim and "Black" Africa; rich areas (with income based on mineral deposits or on an important export crop) which resent having their revenue reallocated on a national basis and are geographically in an eccentric position from the point of view of the larger unit.

The most prominent case is of course that of Katanga, where secession did occur and was

<sup>27</sup> For a further discussion, see my paper, "Military Rule and Political Development in Tropical Africa," presented at the Conference on Armed Forces and Society sponsored by the World Association of Sociologists (London, September, 1967).

<sup>26</sup> Reported by Philippe Decraene in *Le Monde, Sélection Hebdomadaire*, June 30-July 6, 1966.



accompanied by a clash of organized military bodies in the form of a small-scale war, because of the availability of non-Congolese instruments of force on both sides. By contrast, the breakup of the Federation of Mali did not involve strategic violence, but only a show of limited force by the two sides. Many other countries have experienced small-scale versions of this phenomenon: border tensions, involving armed incursions or attempted subversion, are common. Because of the nature of African armies and of the terrain (especially the absence of land communications suitable to military movement between countries with different colonial experiences), however, it is unlikely that these conflicts will lead to international wars; attempts to alter the territorial definition of political communities will either succeed without much violence, or will result in recurrent but minor irritations.<sup>28</sup>

Conflict over the relationship of one or more relatively integrated and distinct parts of the political community to the remainder stems most commonly from the sequels of indirect rule, as in Nigeria and in Uganda. The constitutional settlement achieved under British leadership and supervision as a condition of the grant of independence, which provided for a loose form of federation approaching confederacy for all Nigerian regions, and between Buganda and the rest of Uganda, represented merely a truce in a protracted conflict because it could not be anchored in congruent political norms and structures. Although there are many other unsettled issues in both countries, conflict over the role of the North in Nigeria and of Buganda in Uganda have dominated political life since independence, with power rapidly giving way to force as a means of settlement. In Nigeria, the North attempted to preserve its identity by controlling policy-making at the federal level as the indispensable major partner in successive coalitions. Force came to be used by all sides to insure favorable results in critical elections. The new situation led to a first military coup in January, 1966. When the new military government announced its intention of transforming the country into a unitary state—a decision which was interpreted in the Nigerian context as a fundamental change in the character of the political community—the North resorted to force (attacks upon southern

residents of northern towns) to obtain concessions. In August, 1966, a new military coup put an end to unitary government before it had even begun to function. The sequels have involved an extension of inter-regional conflict, including the breakup of the Army into regional factions, and the secession of the Eastern region in May, 1967, and subsequently a protracted civil war.

In Uganda, Buganda long resisted all attempts by the national government to obtain control of the police on Buganda territory, organized a para-military body of veterans to occupy contested territory (in the "Lost Counties" dispute), and used force to intimidate Baganda whose political loyalty was not assured. Whatever the reasons which led to the strange government-initiated coup of February, 1966, in the course of which Prime Minister Obote assumed full executive powers, his decision to eliminate the offices of President and Vice-President (held by the traditional rulers of Buganda and Busoga respectively), the purge of pro-Baganda elements from the national army, and the eventual proclamation of an entirely new constitution without consulting the federal units, clearly constituted the prelude to an attempt to alter the most important features of the political community by force. Force gave way to the strategic use of violence in the next phase of conflict; and although the Obote government successfully repressed the Buganda uprising of May 1966, it is unlikely that this constitutes the end of the affair.<sup>29</sup>

Although such clear-cut cases are relatively rare, there are numerous instances which involve similar sequels of quasi-indirect rule, as with the Mossi of Upper Volta or the Agni of the Ivory Coast. Related situations occur in countries that contain pastoral and/or nomadic societies which the colonial powers had been satisfied to contain rather than to rule, and for which the end of European presence represents an opportunity to return to a traditional way of life that includes internal feuding and raiding upon neighbors. These patterns of behavior not only involve violence in and of themselves, but often lead to violent clashes with the military and the police.<sup>30</sup> The conflict may be exacerbated by specific factors, as in Mali where the nomads are "white" while the new African

<sup>28</sup> Intra-national and international conflicts involving Ethiopia and the Sudan are major exceptions; they are not considered here because these two countries are peripheral to the universe of post-colonial tropical Africa with which I am particularly concerned.

<sup>29</sup> This account is based on the excellent analysis by M. Crawford Young, "The Obote Revolution," *Africa Report*, June 1966, 8-14.

<sup>30</sup> Manifestations of this process in Uganda are discussed by Colin Leys, "Violence in Africa," *Transition*, 5 (Fourth Quarter, 1965), 17-20.

government is "black," or by the nationalist ideology of the rulers of new states from whose vantage point successful containment alone is not a satisfactory solution.

2. *Stratification Change*: A few African countries deviate from the general pattern discussed in section (1) in that the territorial boundaries established by European colonizers coincided with the domain of a single unit whose stratification system included a clear-cut hierarchical organization of ethnic strata defined in relation to each other with a socially, economically, and politically dominant minority and a subordinate majority approaching the "plural society" discussed by M. G. Smith.<sup>31</sup> The introduction of the principle of legitimacy based on popular sovereignty and of opportunities to implement this principle by means of elections based on universal suffrage in such societies can have genuinely revolutionary consequences, as was the case in Rwanda and in Zanzibar.

In Rwanda, the pastoral Tutsi, who constituted approximately 15 percent of the population, ruled for four centuries over the agricultural Hutu linked to them by an inheritable client-patron "contract" through a highly centralized administration headed by their Mwami, backed by their specialized warrior caste, and based on a monopoly of all cattle and land.<sup>32</sup> Although both the Germans and the Belgians ruled indirectly, reserving educational opportunities and administrative posts almost exclusively for the Tutsi elite, changes began to occur after World War II when the Hutu engaged in the cultivation of a new major cash crop (Arabica coffee) and were encouraged to attend Catholic mission schools. Although political participation was slowly extended by means of indirect elections in 1953 and 1956, its effects were initially mediated by fears of Tutsi retaliation; nevertheless, Hutu-led political organizations began to emerge by the end of the period. In 1959, following the death of the ruling Mwami, Hutu leaders or-

ganized a popular uprising against the coming to power of an extremist Tutsi faction which advocated immediate independence in order to forestall further political and social reforms. Many Tutsi fled the country at this time, and again in the midst of the serious violence that accompanied the 1960 and 1961 elections in which the Hutu party won a decisive victory. The new government went beyond earlier reforms and destroyed the basis of the stratification system by abolishing the old contract relationship and redistributing cattle. A large number of Tutsi still in the country were slain when Tutsi exiles forcibly attempted to reenter Rwanda in 1963; there have been repeated cycles of violence since then.

As a political unit, Zanzibar is composed of the island of that name and of Pemba. On the island of Zanzibar, the stratification system involved consistent cleavages between an Arab minority, who owned most of the land and the revenue-bearing trees on it, and the Shirazi majority, island Africans who lived on the land on a squatter basis; there were also some mainland Africans with ties to Kenya and Tanganyika. Cleavages were less consistent on Pemba, where the Shirazi were economically less differentiated from the Arabs. The British governed the island indirectly through the traditional Arab rulers but extended participation in the usual manner toward the end of the colonial period. The growth of political organizations entailed a mobilization of the various communities accompanied by the expected exacerbation of cleavages and ensuing disturbances. In the elections preparatory to independence of June, 1963, the Afro-Shirazi party (with support among Zanzibar Shirazi and mainland Africans on both islands) won 63 percent of the votes on Zanzibar alone, and a 54 percent majority on both islands together; because of the system of single-member constituencies, however, it failed to obtain a majority of seats, and the government was organized by the ZNP (with support among the Pemba Shirazi and Arabs on both islands), together with the smaller ZPP. One month after independence, on January 21, 1964, insurgents broke into the police arsenal and armed themselves; the police offered minimal resistance, and the insurgents rapidly gained control of the island of Zanzibar. In the course of this coup and after a new Shirazi-dominant government was installed, large numbers of Arabs were slain, fled, or left under duress. Permanent change in the stratification system was thus brought about.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> See Note 6, above.

<sup>32</sup> For background on Rwanda, see in particular Jacques Maquet and Marcel d'Hertefeldt, "Elections en Société Feodale," *Académie royale des Sciences coloniales, Classe des Sciences Morales et Politiques*, XXI, Fasc. 2 (1959); and Jacques Maquet, *The Premise of Inequality in Ruanda* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961). For more recent events, I have relied on Aaron Segal, "Rwanda: The Underlying Causes," *Africa Report*, 9 (April, 1964), 3-8; and on an unpublished paper by Donald Attwood, graduate student in anthropology at the University of Chicago.

<sup>33</sup> This account is based on Keith Kyle, "Coup in Zanzibar," *Africa Report*, 9 (February 1964), 18-20. See also Michael F. Lofchie, *Zanzibar*:

In Zanzibar and in Rwanda, genuine revolutions were possible, with or without a coup, because the stratification system was defined by some central features which could be modified by force. But this is a rare situation in the new African states, found at the national level only in Burundi and sometimes in a particular ethnic group within a country (as in Nigeria and others that contain Fulani societies with serf-like clients or captives). The potential for drastic modifications of the stratification systems involving violence is thus present, but is unlikely to have the spectacular effects it had in Zanzibar or in Rwanda.<sup>34</sup>

3. *The Second Revolution*: Aside from the cases just discussed, there have been few attempts in tropical Africa to bring about rapid and profound changes in established political arrangements and in the underlying social structure by drastic means. The few radical-minded regimes established at independence have tended to choose survival over revolutionary purity and have bowed to necessity by curtailing their goals. Most coups have resulted in military rule, and the main concerns of general-presidents are rule of law, honesty, efficiency, and financial responsibility. Their institutional models resemble those of dedicated European officials during the last phase of colonialism. Yet, many members of newer political generations and older radicals who were by-passed by machine politicians during the first go-around have begun to view the original founding and more recent changes as abortive beginnings. Like the thinkers who launched a wave of political messianism in mid-nineteenth century Europe, they believe that the true revolution is yet to come. The shape it might take has been analyzed by Frantz Fanon, who believed that it would be based upon the total mobilization of the youthful sub-proletariat of the growing cities and of the neglected rural masses.<sup>35</sup> Two situations so far seem to approximate what African revolutions might entail, the aftermath of the Congo-Brazzaville coup of 1963 and the Congo-Kinshasa (ex-Leopoldville) rebellions that began in 1964.

With 65 percent of the school-age population

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*Background to Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966).

<sup>34</sup> The political emancipation of Fulani "captives" probably contributed to the rise of the nationalist movements of Mali and Guinea in 1956-58.

<sup>35</sup> See *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1965). For a more general discussion of Fanon's thought in the context of his life, see my article "Frantz Fanon: A Gospel for the Damned," *Encounter*, November, 1966.

in schools at the time of independence and with one-fifth of its population in three cities, but without much economic development, the Congo-Brazzaville experienced very early and in an unusually acute form the consequences of growing cities peopled by semi-permanently unemployed youths. Opportunities for employment probably even declined absolutely when Brazzaville ceased to be the administrative capital of French Equatorial Africa. Political life had long reflected a sharp antagonism between the Mbochi of the North and several related Bakongo groups, including the Lari (Balali), who had been a focal point for the activities of numerous religio-political protest movements such as Matswanism during the colonial era and provided basic support for the rise to power of a Catholic priest, Fulbert Youlou.<sup>36</sup> Having emerged as a strong man around 1960 after a period of coalition government, Youlou stepped up the construction of a one-party state in mid-1963 in the face of growing unrest stemming from unemployment, open corruption, ruthless elimination of opposition leaders, and his unabashed espousal of causes usually defined as "neo-colonialist". In the course of a confrontation between the government and trade unions in August, the Army, which only a few months earlier had been involved in a near-mutiny put down by the gendarmerie with the aid of French troops, shifted from support of the government to neutrality and eventually demanded Youlou's resignation. This time, French troops did not intervene and the government fell. A moderate provisional government, without direct Army or trade union participation, was immediately installed.

Except for the provision of a dual executive (President and Prime Minister), the other steps in constitutional reform and policy reorientation in the economic and international fields since 1963 have merely brought the country in line with African "radicals" such as Guinea or Mali; on the ethnic side, the Balali (Lari) have been replaced as the leading political group by other Bakongo tribes. The more significant feature of political change is the apparent accountability of the new authorities to the "street," represented by the *Jeunesse*. The lowering of the voting age from 21 to 18 immediately after the coup sug-

<sup>36</sup> For background on Brazzaville, see the several works of Georges Balandier and also Jean-Michel Wagret, *Histoire et Sociologie Politiques de la République du Congo (Brazzaville)* (Paris: Librairie Générale de Droit et de Jurisprudence, 1963). For an analysis of the 1963 coup, see Terray (note 25 above).



gests that it was among young adults, who probably constitute the bulk of the urban population, that the new leaders hoped to find much of their support or, alternatively, that they were already dependent upon them. Although the youth was formed into an ancillary wing of the *Mouvement National pour la Révolution*, it appears that it is the youth branch which is the most powerful part of the organization. The major manifestation of its political role are the activities of the "revolutionary militia" whose major weapon seems to be terror, including a political protection racket backed by the threat of violence and occasional assassinations. The *Jeunesse* as a whole was characterized in 1965 as a "curious mixture of revolutionary idealism and juvenile delinquency," which the government could barely control.<sup>37</sup> Although in the absence of additional information it is impossible to analyze the sociology of this movement, it seems that much of the ire of the *Jeunesse* and of the new regime more generally has been directed at Catholic trade union leaders (including those who had participated in the initial coup), youth leaders, schools, and at the Church more generally. This would suggest that a rejection mood, akin to that which activated earlier messianic movements, underlies contemporary political life. The regime's future remains uncertain. Discontent among the Balali followers of Youlou, the inability of the regime to solve fundamental problems of development and unemployment, factionalism among trade union leaders, have been reflected in sporadic antigovernment riots, plots, and changes of leadership at the top. In June, 1966, the Army reacted to the growing importance of quasi-military political organizations by staging a coup; although this one failed, the next one might well succeed.

The loosely connected movements usually referred to as the Congolese rebellion which originated in Kwilu (near Leopoldville) and in Maniema (Eastern Congo) in 1964 can all be attributed to general factors which are not unique to the Congo, but are exacerbated by the special Congolese situation.<sup>38</sup> They must be distinguished from dissidence elsewhere in Africa, however, not only by their scope and the massive violence engendered, or by their international implications and long-term conse-

quences for the areas involved, but also by their clearly rural rather than urban character. The case of Kwilu is particularly interesting in the present context because of the special ideological meaning it was given by its leaders and the basis on which it was organized. As one study puts it, the Kwilu rebellion emerges as "a revolutionary attempt to correct some of the abuses and injustices by which large segments of the population of the region felt oppressed four years after official Independence and an effort to try once again to express and to concretely realize the goals and dreams promised by the 'First Independence of 1960'."<sup>39</sup>

Kwilu, a densely populated area inhabited by several different ethnic groups whose traditional political organization does not extend much beyond the village level, and whose adult males work mostly as palm cutters on European-owned plantations, had a history of rebellion against the *Force Publique* (1931) and of religio-political protest movements throughout the colonial period. When political participation was extended in 1959, A. Gizenga, P. Mulele, and C. Kamitatu, representing different tribes, organized the *Parti Socialiste Africain* (PSA) whose socialism took the form of a "village paradise-on-earth." It was allied at the national level with the Lumumba coalition. After the Congo crisis of 1960, the PSA itself splintered; Gizenga, connected with the Stanleyville government of 1960-61, became the "imprisoned martyr"; Mulele left the country and spent some time in Communist China; while the more "moderate" Kamitatu faction obtained control of the regional government when Kwilu became a province in 1962.

The growing discontent throughout the region in 1962-63, manifested by palm-cutter strikes and a resurgence of messianic cults,

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in the Congo," *Current History*, April 1965, 213-218; and M. Crawford Young, "The Congo Rebellion," *Africa Report*, 9 (April 1965), 6-11. The present discussion of the Kwilu case is based on Renée C. Fox, Will de Craemer, and Jean-Marie Ribeaucourt, "The Second Independence'; a Case Study of the Kwilu Rebellion in the Congo," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 8 (October 1965), 78-105. The most comprehensive source of information on these rebellions is Benoit Verhaegen, *Rébellions au Congo*, Vol. I ("Les Etudes du C.R.I.S.P." Leopoldville and Brussels, 1966). This work, as well as Herbert Weiss, *Political Protest in the Congo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), became available too late to be fully consulted.

<sup>39</sup> Fox *et al*, p. 78.

<sup>37</sup> *Jeune Afrique*, August 8, 1965. There is some evidence that similar youth groups helped bring Youlou to prominence in 1956 (Wagret, *op. cit.*, p. 65).

<sup>38</sup> Succinct and well-balanced analyses of the Congolese Rebellion can be found in Marvin D. Markowitz and Herbert F. Weiss, "Rebellion



was channeled into an organized movement by Mulele upon his return in mid-1963. He established forest camps in which *équipes*, led by a President and a *Commissaire Politique*, and accompanied by a *soigneur* (healer—usually a practitioner of traditional magic and medicine), were trained in guerilla warfare. The *équipes* formed the *maquis*; above them were the *directions* ultimately responsible to the *centrale*. Mulele also provided the movement with a rudimentary ideology which defined what was wrong, diagnosed causes, and indicated remedies. Within this framework, the culprits are the “Congolese colonialists” or *retardataires* who presently man government at all levels. The remainder of the society is divided into *avancés* (Mulele partisans) and *réactionnaires* (moderates, fence-sitters). The goal is to achieve a new society “conceived as a gigantic village made up of thousands of small villages in which the people find their own authenticity; all that they need materially; justice, creativity, and happiness in working the soil together.”<sup>40</sup> In order to achieve it, the *avancés* must destroy the *retardataires* and persuade the *réactionnaires*. They are bound to triumph if they obey their leaders and adhere to prescribed norms, including certain taboos, such as the prohibition against speaking French, which guarantee their invulnerability.

Support for the movement was generally drawn from Mulele's and Gizenga's own ethnic groups, the BaMbunda and the BaPende; it attracted much of the *jeunesse*, especially teachers and clerks who hoped to be rapidly promoted in the bureaucracy of the new state; ex-policemen dismissed because of a pay mutiny; and a variety of chiefs and lineage and age segments involved in local conflicts. The initial attacks of January, 1964, were planned, systematic, and well-controlled; they were aimed at religious, industrial, governmental, and educational establishments, but spared those considered friendly to the rebels (such as the mission schools which the leaders had attended). In the absence of outside communications, Mulele was able to persuade much of the local population that the revolution had already been victorious elsewhere; hence, in much of the area, after the initial uprising life tended to go back to normal within the framework of the “new society.” Only later, after Europeans had been evacuated and the undisciplined Congolese Army advanced into the region did full-scale, indiscriminate *terre brûlée* violence occur. Although the Congolese Army was able to contain the

Kwilu area as early as April, 1964, they still clashed with rebels at the beginning of 1966, and their present control over the area remains tenuous.

It is likely that growing tensions and the availability of dissident leaders will contribute to the emergence of similar movements elsewhere, that the activities of these movements will generate large-scale violence, and that participation in them will genuinely lift the spirits of those involved. But even if we combine Brazzaville and Kwilu, it is unlikely that movements such as these will be able to translate their revolutionary aspirations into the institutionalization of a new regime and of new social structures. African society does not have a center; its syncretic character insures that it cannot be turned upside down, or that if an attempt is made to do so, some groups will shift their relative positions but the society as a whole will remain very much as it was before. If the revolutionaries succeed in obtaining control of the government, they will resemble at best the radical-minded regimes created in the course of the “first revolution.” If they do not succeed, however, they might give rise to a “vendetta morality” or become full-scale withdrawal movements which consume themselves in senseless violence.<sup>41</sup> In the final analysis, it is unlikely that even the most glorious dedication to force can broaden the limits of the range of variation imposed on political arrangements by contemporary African society.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

Seeking to overcome the parochialism of area studies and the intellectual irrelevance of raw empiricism, many scholars dealing with the politics of new states have hit upon the device of bringing the foreground of the contemporary scene into sharp focus, extracting it from context, and blowing up the recorded image for leisurely contemplation. The background tends to be reduced to an indistinct blur called “tradition,” which is discarded because it yields little interesting information. But vastly blown-up stills of political development, modernization, or integration obtained in this manner tend to make these processes appear similar regardless of what is being developed, modernized, or integrated. One wonders, however, whether the similarities genuinely stem from the phenomena observed or whether they are artifacts arising from the

<sup>41</sup> For similar outcomes elsewhere see, for example, E. J. Hobsbawn, *Primitive Rebels* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1965).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

manipulation of the recorded images; whether the information on which many current generalizations are based pertains to the reality the image sought to capture, or whether it pertains mainly to the characteristics of the lens and of the film used to record it.

Surely, as we begin to explore an unknown world, we must master the techniques of *cinéma-vérité*, using hand-held cameras that are a more direct extension of the observer's eye, suitable for obtaining intimate moving pictures of the varying patterns subsumed under the terms political development, modernization or integration. Understanding of these processes will be achieved, not by reducing them prematurely to a common denominator, but by seeking to preserve their singularity and then comparing their manifestations in different settings. The characteristics of political life in all the new states can easily be subsumed under relatively few general headings. However useful such efforts may be in clearing the ground, however, we must remember that the same headings will refer to very different things where, for example, national communities are being carved out of a more universal one and the stratification system is defined by an opposition between urban elites that control land and peasant masses, as against situations where many small societies devoid of this sharp differentiation are being amalgamated into arbitrarily defined larger wholes under the aegis of an open stratum of recently educated men drawn more or less evenly from the component societies that constitute the country.

The situation in most of tropical Africa is so extreme that studies focused primarily on incipient central institutions almost necessarily exaggerate their importance in relation to the society as a whole.<sup>42</sup> Hence, I have tried in this essay to provide some balance by considering politics in the more general con-

text of African societies and by focusing on conflict as a major element of political life. This is not to say that no institutionalization is taking place, but rather that until such processes reach a certain level—as yet unspecified—force and violence are likely to remain salient features of political action.<sup>43</sup> Since various factors insure the persistence of most of the new territorial units even if political institutionalization does not occur at a very high rate, we must make a place for conflict in our conceptual apparatus. Although the incidence of certain manifestations of conflict may be relatively random, political conflict is not a random process but derives a discernible structure from the characteristics of the society itself, as do other patterns of political life. Much more precision can be achieved than in this essay by operationalizing independent and dependent variables in a manner to obtain elements from which a comparative typology can be constructed.

From this point of view, it is clear that a small number of countries, e.g., the Ivory Coast and Ghana, stand out from the rest of the pack and are on the verge of reaching a threshold of societal development which may be labeled "incipient modernity." These are exceptional in the contemporary African scene, and are likely to become even more exceptional in the predictable future as the spillover effects of incipient modernization become infused into every sphere of social life, including the political. At the other extreme, there is a fairly large group of countries, such as the Central African Republic or Upper Volta, which are among the least developed countries in the entire world. Unfortunately, they are likely to remain at the bottom for a long time, since it has become increasingly evident that the die was cast several decades ago in the sense that wherever there was *some* potential for relatively rapid modernization, it was brought out during the colonial period. In between are countries with some potential but with a complex of problems which has so far prevented it from emerging. Some of these will join the first group, while the others will, unfortunately, join the second. It is not necessary to view politics as merely epiphenomenal to suggest that the general characteristics of the social structure, and especially the nature of primordial solidarities combined with gross

<sup>42</sup> For example, the most recently compiled *Selected Economic Data for the Less Developed Countries*, published by the Agency for International Development in June, 1967 (data for 1965 and 1966), shows that Africa (not including the United Arab Republic and the Union of South Africa) is the lowest ranking of four areas (Africa, East Asia, Latin America, Near East/South Asia) on total GNP, Annual Growth of GNP, electric power per capita, life expectancy, people per physician, literacy, pupils as percent of population. It was tied with one other area for bottom place on several other indicators, and ranked relatively high only on acres of agricultural land available per capita.

<sup>43</sup> An approach to the study of institutionalization and integration is suggested in my paper, "Patterns of Integration," in *The Journal of Modern African Studies* (forthcoming, 1968).

differences in degree of modernization, impose limits within which variations of regime can occur.

Although the relationship between political conflict and political development has not been explicitly examined in this essay, this does not imply that I view the functions of conflict in a society as wholly negative. Integration into a free society does not entail the total elimination of conflict from political life, but rather its containment within acceptable limits as indicated by a shift from force to power and authority.<sup>44</sup> How that is achieved remains a

central problem of the social sciences which far transcends the parochial concerns of particular disciplines or of sub-fields within each. One thing is clear, however: Progress in this direction requires an acceptance of the premise itself—the institutionalization at the cultural level of a belief that conflict is a potentially manageable aspect of society, rather than the persistence of wishful thinking about its permanent disappearance expressed in the form of ideologies or scientific theories.

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<sup>44</sup> This view is inspired by Ralf Dahrendorf, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*

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(Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959), especially p. 318. See also my general argument in *Creating Political Order: The Party-States of West Africa* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1966).